

**RI CRMC Narragansett Bay SAMP  
Aquaculture Element Working Group Meeting/East Passage Meeting  
July 19, 2021 from 4:00 – 6:00pm  
Summary Notes**

**Welcome - James Boyd, RI Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC); Jennifer McCann, URI Coastal Resources Center (URI CRC)**

Jennifer McCann, of the University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center (URI CRC), served as facilitator and opened the meeting by welcoming virtual attendees. She indicated that the purposes of the meeting were to communicate the overall Bay SAMP aquaculture element purpose, process, and expectations; and identify Working Group (WG) information needs to assist with the development of an informed process and product. She also explained how the series of virtual meetings were being organized to provide as much of an in-person sense as possible. She also indicated that the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) has on its own offered proactively to enhance its notification process, by which it makes public lease applications under review.

McCann then introduced James Boyd, CRMC deputy director of CRMC, who reminded the group that the CRMC, as the state's coastal program administrator, is committed to ensuring a productive, science-informed, and transparent process to develop, review, and adopt the NBay SAMP. A goal for all SAMP chapters, he said, is apply "ecosystem-based management" approaches, to leverage economic opportunity and "minimize environmental impacts," within the context of a stakeholder-driven process. He also indicated that a slate of community meetings is providing multiple opportunities for public and stakeholder involvement. Boyd also said that a great deal of science data is available about Narragansett Bay which can inform the aquaculture element – a chapter and complementary siting map or tool – so the aim is to have a comprehensive draft chapter and a detailed map prepared for public review by the end of the year.

**The Role of the Working Group - James Boyd**

Boyd indicated that the role of the working group is strictly advisory, with no legal or regulatory authority. He said that CRMC is relying on the combined expertise of the working group to assist the agency with putting forth recommendations for consideration in the development of an aquaculture zoning map. Also, he said that a formal process will be applied to review proposed regulatory changes, that this process could begin, at the earliest, in spring 2022, and that the working group will advise CRMC throughout the process. Furthermore, he indicated that a new list serve was underway which anyone from the public will be able to sign up for in order to receive all information pertaining to lease permit applications. He urged everyone to sign up for the list serve (now at [http://listserve.ri.gov/mailman/listinfo/ri\\_aquaculture](http://listserve.ri.gov/mailman/listinfo/ri_aquaculture)) and asked working group members to ask their networks to encourage signups as well.

**Approach and Timeline for the Aquaculture Element – Jennifer McCann**

McCann said that the working group functions as a “sounding board” for community questions and concerns, and that each Rhode Island coastal community has been given the opportunity to assign three members to the group. Three community virtual meetings – East Bay, West Bay, Sakonnet River—are providing for wide stakeholder participation. McCann provided this general timetable for the SAMP aquaculture element: Jul-Oct 2021/Issue Identification; Sept-Dec 2021/Issue Solution development; Jan-Apr 2022/Finalize Revisions; and May-Dec 2022/Initiate Rulemaking, as a formal process.

Following this, several questions were taken; Kenny Mendez, of Tiverton, asked how the notification process will work between bay resources agencies – for example, if and how the CRMC will dovetail in any way with marine fisheries service noticing. Boyd responded that while agencies may be reviewing related material, the CRMC notification list serve will strictly adhere to CRMC aquaculture permitting review information.

### **Aquaculture Element - Presentation and Dialogue - Chris Damon, URI**

#### Hard Constraints Map

Chris Damon, a URI data and mapping specialist, provided a presentation, “Preliminary Screening Criteria for Siting Aquaculture Lease Locations in RI Waters.” He shared aspects of an in-process Hard Constraints Map. The map reflects authoritative data sources, like Rhode Island GIS and NOAA, and will illustrate areas largely off-limits to aquaculture in state waters, per existing CRMC regulations. Damon indicated that mapping will be used also to illustrate areas that have potential, or are possible candidates for aquaculture siting in state waters. McCann asked Boyd to define the term “hard constraint” for the group, and Boyd said that, in general, a hard constraint can be seen as “areas that would not be considered for new aquaculture” efforts. He also said that the mapping effort is going to bring in newly available or updated information, such as locations for the latest mapped eelgrass areas in state waters. Damon added that the mapping will be an iterative process, so the working group is encouraged to advise CRMC of other potential data that could enhance the hard constraint information. McCann also indicated that the group may find other tools, like Rhode Island ShellFAST, which is currently being developed, helpful for understanding and using data for the SAMP process.

At this point, a discussion took place regarding other possible constraints. Several kinds of responses were given. For example, working group member Caitlin Chaffee, manager of the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, pointed out that the reserve itself and its boundaries should be considered for the map. Working group member Gary Crosby, planner for the Town of Portsmouth, asked if public access or rights-of-way (town and state) can be considered a constraint to aquaculture lease siting. Working group member Lisa Bryer, planner for Jamestown, said public access and rights-of-way issues may need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. And working group member, Donna Cook, of the Tiverton Town Council, indicated strong support for recognizing public access and rights-of-way as a priority use of the bay, and she asked why the CRMC is focusing on aquaculture specifically.

In response, Boyd said that public access and rights-of-way are definitely chief interests of the CRMC, but that the agency’s effort is to provide balanced management of a wide array of coastal assets – from

environmental, to economic, and social and cultural, and that the state has identified aquaculture as an economic priority. He said that the aquaculture element of the NBay SAMP is focused on that very effort of ensuring a balance is struck between varied and important interests. He said this is why it is critical that everyone who wants a say in the process should be informed about the process, and the list serve is an important step toward getting as many stakeholders involved as possible, with working group meetings and future public workshops also being important for the provision of input to the SAMP process (see Other Revised Notification Process two sections down).

#### Enhanced Navigational and Aesthetic Guidelines or Standards

The group talked about refining or enhancing the method via which aquaculture leases are marked so other bay users, including boaters, know to steer away from farms and their equipment – CRMC Aquaculture Coordinator Ben Goetsch, with Boyd providing information as well, indicated that the working group will consider options for marking systems, with effort being made to consider effectiveness of markers, in terms of safety, and their aesthetic appeal. Lighted buoys are one option, for example, as are reflectors. Working group member and U.S. Coast Guard representative Erin Artis offered that the Guard can likely provide data or guidance to assist with the process.

#### Other Revised Notification Process

Working group member Cook, of Tiverton, commented that her town needs more assistance from CRMC with important activities like harbor management planning, and that the CRMC needs to do more to ensure a wide array of stakeholders know about potential aquaculture lease review processes. Boyd indicated that CRMC can provide the harbor management planning assistance, and that activities like the list serve, working group meetings, and future public workshops represent a concerted effort to secure significant and wide stakeholder input and involvement. He said CRMC will consider other ideas too, but that it's difficult, from a logistics standpoint, to notify each and every stakeholder, as bay resources belong to all. He said more thinking can go into how, on top of the noted activities, the process is open to as many as possible – he said the town notification process could be one avenue to look at. Mendez, the recreational fisherman from Tiverton, asked again about whether there may be shared overlap between CRMC and marine fisheries service noticing, and Boyd reiterated that the CRMC process is completely separate, to keep it clean, transparent, and consistent,

After this, the discussion returned to the second item in the agenda (see Enhanced Navigational and Aesthetic Guidelines or Standards, above).

#### **Next Steps – Jen McCann and James Boyd**

The group asked several more questions about items that could be potentially considered as hard constraints for the mapping process discussed earlier. Working group member Roger Tellier, of North Kingstown, asked if boat ramps will be shown, and Damon and Boyd indicated that public ramps would be. Working group member Richard Astles, of New England Marine Pilots and North Kingstown, asked if a marked navigation channel at Quonset would be put in, and Damon said yes, he was aware of it.

McCann asked if mooring fields would be illustrated on the map, and Boyd and Damon said there could possibly be ways of mapping these in, if the data has been collected and exists already.

Mendez asked what happens if there are sections of the map left clear of constraints – does this mean those are places which will be targeted for aquaculture leases? Boyd said it is too soon to provide an answer on that, and that the process of collecting the information, stakeholder input, and weighing it all must take place first. He said “We have a lot more thought and data layers to go.”

Working group member and Shellfisherman Dave Ghigliotty asked the final question, if input would be gathered from the dragger industry, and Boyd said yes, that if draggers want to provide information, such as where they fish, that would be useful for the process.

For next steps, McCann told the group that a West Passage working group meeting, similar to this one, would take place August 2, and that everyone would receive links for it. She asked the group to remind people to sign up for the list serve and to contribute hard constraint information too. She and Boyd thanked the working group for their efforts, and said that discussion, especially on the notification system enhancement, is very useful. McCann then adjourned the meeting.